

STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO  
**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY'S EFFORTS TO RECRUIT, HIRE, AND  
PROMOTE VETERANS**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

November 13, 2007

Mr. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THIS SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.3 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW), this nation's largest combat veterans' organization, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today before you today.

We strongly believe that recruiting, hiring and promoting veterans into the various Federal agencies is a natural fit for veterans and the government. We have long advocated for greater emphasis in the areas of veteran's preference in filling federal vacancies. We believe education and gainful employment are the fundamentals for a successful transition for all service members. The VFW applauds this committee for focusing its efforts on veterans' preference within the

Department of Homeland Security (DHS). And we are heartily encouraged by the ongoing efforts and leadership that DHS has demonstrated in attracting veterans to federal employment.

The VFW recognizes the growing need to attract young and talented employees to federal employment. According to the Office of Personal Management (OPM), the federal government anticipates an 18.5 percent retirement rate government wide between FY 2006 to FY 2010. The continuation of this trend shows the federal government losing 40 percent of its work force in the coming years. To fill this yawning gap, the VFW believes, there is no better applicant than America's young veterans.

As employees, America's service members are known for their discipline, technical skills, and leadership. Our military is the finest and most technologically advanced in the world. Our nation invests billions of dollars annually training and developing in our troops the technical skills, loyalty, discipline, selflessness, leadership, and the ability to follow instructions and perform under pressure. This is the skill set of a military veteran.

Despite service members' qualities, they experience trepidation in entering the work force. A November 5<sup>th</sup> Military.com poll illustrates the need for assistance for recently departed service members. Of 4,442 military or veteran respondents, eighty-one percent of transitioning military personnel surveyed revealed that they do not feel fully prepared to enter the job market. Of those who feel unprepared: seventy-two percent of respondents feel unprepared to negotiate salary and benefits, seventy-six percent report inability to effectively translate their military skills to civilian terms, and fifty-seven percent are unsure of how to network professionally. While our service members may possess the skills to perform the job and the discipline to see work through to completion, they lack the confidence and the knowledge to market their own strengths.

This sector of the veterans' population is a rich environment for federal recruiting. While service members may not be comfortable navigating the job market, federal employment offers them many of the same factors that attracted them to military service: a sense of service, innovative training, opportunities for travel, and competitive benefits. Also, the bulk of Military

Occupational Specialties (MOS) translate directly into federal job descriptions, especially when using web based tools like the One Net Center: <http://online.onetcenter.org/crosswalk>.

The Military.com survey also included input from 287 recruiters and hiring managers from a variety of businesses and industries of all sizes. The survey results stated that sixty percent of hiring managers and recruiters reported favorable attitudes toward employing veterans, yet many face difficulties recruiting and hiring from this talent pool. Sixty-one percent reveal they do not have a complete understanding of the qualifications ex-service members offer. Sixty-four percent feel that veterans need additional assistance to make a successful transition into the civilian job-seeking market, with twenty-seven percent citing the need for stronger interviewing skills. Fifty-three percent of employers spend two percent or less of their recruitment advertising budget on targeted military hiring. Due to employers' lack of understanding and undervaluing veterans as employees, many do not seek out these extraordinary Americans.

The lack of understanding by private industry further creates an opportunity for federal employers, but it also presents a number of challenges. The lack of private sector recruiting reduces the competition for federal recruiters in attracting skilled veterans. In order to capitalize on this market trend, federal recruiters and managers must be able to recognize and translate military skill sets into the needs of the given opening. The managers and recruiters must also have current training in veterans' employment standards as prescribed by the Office of Personal Management (OPM).

### **Veterans Preference Background**

Since the Civil War, veterans of the Armed Forces have been given some degree of preference in obtaining federal employment. In recognition of their sacrifices, Congress continues to enact laws to prevent veterans seeking federal employment from discrimination for their military service. Veterans' preference recognizes the economic loss suffered by citizens who have served in uniform, grants veterans a favorable competitive position for Government employment, and acknowledges the larger obligation owed to disabled veterans.

The *Veterans' Preference Act of 1944*, established the modern form of veterans' preference and is now codified in various provisions of Title 5, United States Code. Title 5 states that veterans, who served in military campaigns or are disabled, are entitled to preference among competitive applicants, and their retention is protected during reductions of the work force. In addition to receiving preference in competitive appointments, veterans may be considered for special noncompetitive appointments for which only they are eligible.

*The Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (Pub. L. 93-112, Title V), as amended (Pub. L. 93-516), requires the development and implementation of affirmative employment programs for the hiring, placement, and advancement of individuals with disabilities, as well as annual reports. Further, Executive Order 13164 requires Federal agencies to establish written procedures to facilitate the provision of reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities so that they can enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities.

### **Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Veterans Outreach Initiative**

The office of Human Capital, within DHS, is engaging veterans at many levels with the goal of recruiting from among their ranks. With the recent formation of a Veterans Outreach Advisory Council they enlisted the support of numerous offices across government and throughout the Veterans Service Organization (VSO) community. During the recent meeting of November 6, 2007, DHS reported on the past recruitment activities and elicited ideas for future endeavors. The three-part strategy recruitment approach includes events, outreach, and partnership.

The veterans' recruitment strategy is in the early stages of development. DHS regularly attends veterans-focused job fairs. They have also recently launched a veterans-centric page with a number of pertinent links on the DHS's web site. The recent formation of the advisory council is a positive step to draw on the experiences and ongoing efforts to employ veterans and service disabled veterans. The VFW is very encouraged by the ongoing efforts and hopeful to broaden the campaign to attract a dedicated and deserving population of America's veterans.

The VFW sees a number of challenges in successfully carrying out this campaign. Of which, the primary challenge is adequate funding and more full time DHS staff solely dedicated to this program. As we have seen in VA, and other agencies, DHS could quickly become a victim of their own success. With an increase of veteran applicants and wider recognition of DHS's desire to attract skilled applicants, the larger number of applications and inflow of paper will quickly inundate the small staff working on this initiative. This overburdened staff will face the daunting task of placing these veterans within the numerous components within DHS. The complexity of the training is great; each component requires specific skills, each staffing manager of each component will require training on veterans' preference law, and further training on accommodation of persons with disabilities in the workplace. We urge Congress to value this program and implement a lasting funding stream to sustain it into the future.

Further consideration is needed in publicizing the program externally. While DHS is ramping up efforts to attract veterans, education on veterans' preference appointments is paramount. The veterans with the greatest need for opportunities are service-disabled veterans. There is no greater key to restoring a disabled veteran's income, self-reliance, and repaying our nation's eternal debt like that of providing a hand-up vice a handout. We urge DHS to focus strongly on educating as a means of publicizing opportunities within the agency.

We believe that a robust veterans' employment preference program, such as this, could lead the way toward greater outreach efforts across agencies to attract veterans. The VFW is hopeful that this program will be developed and managed as an example of efficient and compassionate governance. Continued Congressional oversight, leadership within the agency, and feedback from veterans on this program will determine the depth and breadth of its success as a model for future implementation of veterans' preference.

The VFW looks forward to working with both this committee and DHS to make this program a success. We welcome any questions that this committee may have, thank you.